

Envisioning a Post-Saddam Iraqi Military

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Brief Analysis

Retraining and reorganizing the Iraqi military and eliminating weapons of mass destruction (WMD) will be vital tasks in the wake of any U.S.-led invasion of Iraq. Yet, political change is a prerequisite for military change, and neglecting the former could pose disastrous consequences for the latter. Specifically, the United States should assist in the creation of an apolitical, professional Iraqi military in concert with a new pluralist, federal, civilian-led Iraqi government with indigenous roots. Ultimately, these efforts would help to stabilize Iraq both internally and vis-a-vis its neighbors.

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The political, economic, and military aspects of a post-Saddam Iraq are interconnected. Replacing Saddam Husayn with another autocracy would not serve U.S. interests. A broad-based, representative government that better reflects Iraq society is a precondition for successful military reform. That would entail creating a more representative military officer corps, reforming the security and armed services, and reorganizing the military along defensive lines. Moreover, a government organized along federal lines would rely on local law enforcement for internal security, alleviating the need for a large army or security apparatus. Such changes could foster a less aggressive Iraq that is less likely to assert a leadership role in the Arab world.

U.S. and allied forces will need to restructure Iraq's armed forces along several lines. First, Saddam's influence cannot be allowed to linger in the security and armed services. Given their repressive history, the bulk of Iraq's intelligence and security organizations should be scrapped, while those that can be reformed should be purged. These reforms may create political and security problems, though. Politically speaking, the United States must reassure the broader Sunni Arab community that such changes would not constitute a vendetta against them; to this end, it should promote Sunni tribes and individuals that have stood apart from Saddam's regime. From a security standpoint, individuals purged from the military would require retraining and supervision so that they could take

part in the legitimate economy rather than organized crime or subversive activities against the new government.

Although Iraq's new military must be able to support the country's real defensive needs, it must also be rendered incapable of posing a threat to Iraq's larger neighbors. The United States, not Iraq, will ensure regional stability and provide a counterbalance to Iran. Past wars and sanctions have dramatically decreased Iraq's military equipment and offensive capabilities. Given the inevitable postwar reconstruction, debt, and reparations obligations, a new Iraqi regime would lack the funds needed to pursue large-scale rearmament. In this context, U.S.-led forces should curtail Iraq's strategic mobility and its reliance on standing forces, which should eventually be replaced with a reserve system.

Even after Saddam is toppled, the Iraqi WMD threat will still present perhaps the greatest challenge to the United States. To manage this threat, the United States should adopt a number of measures: finding employment for former weapons scientists in Iraq's reconstructed economy; enhancing Iraq's missile/WMD defenses and incorporating the country into a Cooperative Defense Initiative program along the lines of that seen among the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states; and providing U.S. security assurances to Iraq as a substitute for an independent WMD capability.

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In the immediate post-Saddam aftermath, Iraq's military needs will be minimal. U.S. troop presence will be large and prolonged (probably five to seven years) and should be sufficient to counter challenges to Iraq's territorial integrity. Moreover, three regional security arrangements could help to foster stability. First, a U.S.-Iraqi bilateral alliance could strengthen Iraq internally and ensure domestic cohesion. Second, a security condominium comprising Iraq, Iran, the GCC states, the United States, and other countries could agree to a series of arms-reduction and confidence-building measures. Third, the international community could encourage a security pact in the region with security guarantees for Iraq, which would obviate its need for a WMD program and generate regional economic benefits.

U.S. objectives do not include conquering Iraq and running the country. Hence, it would be useful to involve the UN in any political and military changes in Iraq, albeit with the United States at the core of any multinational force. In view of the quantity and nature of UN resolutions on Iraq, which already impose strict limitations regarding WMD production and military forces, the appropriate model for restructuring the country would be a UN-appointed "special representative of the secretary-general" rather than a U.S. military administration. Moreover, in the aftermath of a war, all Iraqis should be granted equal opportunity to contribute to the establishment of a new regime. Talented diaspora Iraqis should also be invited to participate in the reconstruction process. Yet, the United States should not privilege any particular groups or individuals by designating them as a provisional government or as the future leaders of Iraq. Iraqis must form a new government that derives its legitimacy from the citizenry.

The prospects for democracy in Iraq are better than for most Middle Eastern countries. Iraq still has a middle class and an urban society (albeit suffering from Saddam's repression and subsequent economic woes) that could ensure democratic viability. Many of the internal sociocultural problems that could impede democracy have been exaggerated. Still, democratization is not an instantaneous process. One essential ingredient is a national reeducation program that allows Iraqis to internalize the benefits of reconstruction.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

As long as the security services are intact (i.e., the Republican and Special Republican Guard), a coup against Saddam would likely be stifled. Were a coup to occur during the buildup to U.S. intervention, Washington could be forced to suspend its plans for military action pending confirmation that the new regime intended to comply with U.S. and UN demands (i.e., ending WMD production and domestic repression). Alternatively, if a coup occurred during an

intervention, the United States would more likely continue its military efforts, particularly if operational momentum had already brought U.S.-led forces near Baghdad. In such a situation, Washington would need to evaluate whether to consider the new administration as a provisional government or replace it with a more democratically oriented transitional regime. In any case, once Saddam were unseated, the Special Republican Guard would lose its clout, and U.S.-led forces would need to dismantle its infrastructure and prevent its officers from participating in public life.

Ultimately, restructuring the Iraqi political system post-Saddam would be crucial for domestic cohesion and regional and international stability. Yet, this cannot be achieved through foreign imposition. Iraqis must create their own system in order to inculcate democratic values and build a better future.

This Special Policy Forum Report was prepared by Eran Benedek.

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